



Alhambra School District No. 68

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Redistricting Position Paper

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Alhambra School District

February 2006

Rationale

The Alhambra School District is a top-rated district and is known locally and nationally for its curriculum programs. Currently, the district offers outstanding educational opportunities for preschool through eighth grade students, and would welcome the opportunity to expand our programs and services for students through their high school years. Our research shows the longer students stay in Alhambra, the higher their achievement. Since redistricting is on the table, we encourage the commission to explore the model of common school districts absorbing one or more high schools within their systems. This would create an optimal district size in regard to enrollment, and allow for a continuation of the excellent programs and relationships parents and communities have come to know and expect. Our parents and community take great pride in our schools and academic programs and would welcome the opportunity to expand educational services for their children through the 12th grade.

Although there is much debate on this issue, the Alhambra School District would like to provide the Commission with pertinent information and a viable solution. Our top priority is providing a quality education for the children of this district, and every decision that is made, is made in the best interest of students. As the Commission studies this situation and develops a plan, we urge you to continue keeping Arizona's children at the forefront of all decisions made.

District Background Information

The Alhambra School District dates back to the late 1800's when it was first organized on August 6, 1888. From the days that this district was a one-room brick building located on 33rd Avenue and Grand, which is still standing today, Alhambra District has blossomed into a state and nationally recognized school district providing excellent educational services for students.

Alhambra has long been known for its outstanding student achievement and curricular programs, strong fiscal management, and its highly qualified teaching staff. The district has also gained a reputation of quality and

commitment that its community has come to expect. Over the last 10 years, Alhambra has seen an incredible increase in student enrollment as well as a shift in demographics. Currently the district educates more than 15,600 students in preschool through eighth grades — 89% receive free/reduced price food services and 51% are English language learners speaking one of 66 different languages. Despite these challenges, Alhambra is known for its academic excellence and high standards of education. This success is not only attributed to the committed and dedicated employees of the district, but also the respect and close relationship we have developed with parents, students, and community members. Alhambra has worked incredibly hard to obtain this respect and reputation for excellence, which was created by having the opportunities to attend to individual school and community needs and concerns.

There are many reasons Alhambra District is the reputable district that many hear about and aspire to be a part of:

- Administrative Costs—6.8 percent of Alhambra’s budget is spent on administrative costs, compared to Arizona’s 9.5 percent and the nation’s 10.9 percent.
- Classroom expenditures – 63.0 percent of Alhambra’s budget is spent in the classroom, compared to Arizona’s 58.6 percent and the nation’s 61.5 percent. Alhambra’s classroom dollar ranking is 20 of 227 districts in the state as evaluated by the Arizona Office of the Auditor General.
- The district implemented a comprehensive, systemic, and fiscally responsible preventive maintenance program for school facilities and transportation vehicles that minimizes costly expenditures and ensures our schools and vehicles remain in excellent condition.
- The district continually searches for ways to save money utilizing economies of scale such as entering into and taking advantage of purchasing agreements and consortiums to maximize the purchase of goods and services at reduced rates, and implementing cost-saving measures such as our award-winning energy conservation program which saves the district nearly \$300,000 annually.
- For years, Alhambra District has offered one of the highest starting salaries for new teachers in the state, as well as one of the highest overall teacher’s salary schedule in the state, and continues to provide salary raises each year.
- Ninety-six percent of teachers are highly qualified, and 76 percent of instructional assistants are highly qualified.

- The District provides teachers a comprehensive staff development program with more than 200 offerings each year. All administrators and teachers are required to obtain 15 clock hours of professional development each year.
- Two full days of inservice training is provided for all first and second-year teachers prior to the start of the school year with continued training and mentoring support throughout the year.
- Thirty classroom teachers were trained by ASU in providing Structured English Immersion training, and they now train other teachers districtwide.
- The district implemented a new technology program, Galileo K-12 Online, that allows teachers to electronically manage the learning of students by providing teachers with computer-generated testing that is correlated to the curriculum.
- Alhambra was 1 of 22 districts nationwide selected to partner with Johns Hopkins University and the Center for Data Driven Research in Education for the purpose of utilizing data analysis to make better informed decisions about student learning and guide instructional practices to make gains in student achievement.
- The district implemented a tutoring program where 80 teachers who have a history of high student achievement tutor students in reading after school and on weekends. Students are monitored and assessed on a regular basis to ensure progress.
- Despite Alhambra's demographics, student achievement is incredibly high; using the AIMS DPA, students showed gains in reading, math, and writing over last year. In addition, we compared students who were in the district for one year or less to students who have been with the district for a number of years. Those students in the district for the majority of their education did significantly better than those students who were in the district for less than one year.
- Every five to seven years, the District contracts with an outside researcher to conduct a parent/community survey. The most recent survey concludes that Alhambra District Community members and staff are very satisfied with the current programs provided to the students in Alhambra schools. About 97% rated the overall job the district does in educating students as excellent, good, or average. About 94% gave the quality of education in Alhambra schools a grade of A+, A, or B, compared to 75% who graded Arizona schools as an A+, A, or B.

Each year the Alhambra School District receives numerous awards for leadership, fiscal management, and innovative teaching programs:

- Superintendent received Arizona Distinguished Administrator of the Year, an Award of Excellence for Contributions to Public Education, and Arizona State University's College of Education Hall of Fame Award
- Recipient of the National Distinguished Principal Award
- One school received the Intel and Scholastic's National School of Distinction Award (1 of 10 elementary schools nationwide out of 3,300 nominations)
- Five schools selected as Arizona A+ Schools
- Two schools received Arizona's A+ Exemplary Programs Award
- Recipient of the Award of Excellence in Financial Reporting from both the national Government Finance Officers Association and the Association of School Business Officials, International for over ten years.
- Numerous teachers receive Arizona School Boards Association's Golden Bell Awards for innovation programs that increase student achievement
- Recipient of the Mayor's Partnership Award in 1996, 1997, and 2004
- One of five finalists for Arizona's Teacher of the Year
- Nine teachers received The Rodel Charitable Foundation's Exemplary Teacher Award
- Recipient of the Governor's Award for Energy Efficiency
- Recipient of the Governor's Energy Advocate of the Year Award
- Recipient of the Arizona Tax Research Association 2004 ATRA Good Government Award (for implementing cost-saving utility measures and practices)
- Numerous other teaching and best practices awards have been awarded to Alhambra's District

Research

There are many different opinions on redistricting, but this concept interrelates and goes hand-in-hand with consolidation and/or unification efforts. Some believe that consolidation/unification will decrease administrative spending and put more dollars in the classroom, while others believe it increases student achievement. In 2002, the Arizona Office of the Auditor General (OAG) released a report commissioned by the Goldwater Institute on school districts' administrative spending in relationship to the size of the district and the impact of a statewide consolidation movement ("Competition or Consolidation? The School District Consolidation Debate Revisited." Policy Report No. 189/January 12, 2004. Goldwater Institute.) Listed below is a sampling of the report's findings:

- Statewide school district consolidation is unlikely to produce the hoped-for fiscal savings; empirical research shows consolidation increases administrative costs at the expense of classroom instruction, yielding larger classes, fewer teachers, and lower student achievement.
- The largest portion of administrative expenses, 52 percent, occurs at the individual school level, and identified the size of individual schools, not districts, as a key factor.
- Because the majority of all administrative costs (52 percent) occurs at the individual school level, current consolidation proposals would address less than half of all administrative costs.
- Consolidation efforts in other states have resulted in larger, not smaller administrative staffs, further eroding economies-of-scale savings.
- The OAG conducted a more comprehensive analysis of school district administrative costs that ranked all 209 districts from highest to lowest administrative spending per pupil in relationship to its size. Among the top tier of school districts for lowest per-pupil spending on administration (the top 70 of 209) – where one would expect large school districts to dominate – medium, small, and even one very small district spent less on administration per-pupil than many of Arizona’s 10 largest school districts.
- Over 30 years of research indicates that school district size does not determine efficiency.
- Empirical research indicates that consolidation, and the accompanying centralization, will increase administration at the expense of classroom instruction, with fewer resources, larger classes, and more administrative work for teachers.
- National data confirm that as school districts consolidate they become more inefficient, the number of individual schools declines, and schools become larger.
- Consolidation appears to be at best a marginal reform yielding negligible fiscal savings.
- Empirical consolidation research indicates smaller, decentralized school districts are significantly more efficient than larger, centralized districts. In Arizona, data show that small and medium districts consistently spend as much or as less on administration than the state’s largest districts.

- Empirical research shows that in consolidated school districts, the result is worse education and higher, not lower, per-pupil costs. Consolidation and its accompanying centralization would likely increase administration at the expense of classroom instruction, leading to larger classes, more administrators, and fewer teachers.

Conclusion

As the commission embarks on this massive task, it is important to keep in mind what our primary purpose is – to educate our future leaders in the best educational environment possible. Alhambra District has a long history of educational excellence and has worked incredibly hard at building a partnership with parents, community members, and business partners. We believe education is a shared responsibility and our community takes pride in our outstanding schools, parental involvement activities, and high student achievement. As stated earlier, Alhambra welcomes the opportunity to provide outstanding educational opportunities for students from kindergarten through 12th grade, and we encourage the commission to explore the possibility of expanding the Alhambra School District by adding one or two high schools within the District's boundaries. This plan would ensure continuity with curricular alignment and programs, as well as provide our parents and community members with quality educational opportunities through the high school level, which is something our community expects.